THE VEGETABLE PLOT

USES OF LIME

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

Those who are starting a new garden or have taken on an old garden should study this question of lime. Lime is said to be the basis of fertility in the soil, and it is well known to all gardeners that unless there is a fair percentage of lime in the soil the growth of most plants cannot proceed satisfactorily.

In the vegetable garden there are no plants of any importance which dislike lime, and some, such as beans and peas, need it in considerable quantities. When a new soil has been well dug, manured, and cropped in a proper manner and the results are disappointing and not attributable to the weather, it would be well to inquire whether the cause is not insufficiency of lime. Horticultural scientists say that lime is needed in the soil to the extent of one part in 200, but as this appears to mean the addition of several pounds of lime to each square yard we must presume that there is already a fair amount in most soils. Lime is not manure, and has little or no manurial value, but its purpose is to convert the dormant or inert plant food into a state available to the plants. Lime has a mechanical as well as a chemical action. It breaks down the adhesiveness of a heavy clay soil and enables, to some extent, a lighter soil to become more moisture-holding. Where the soil has been heavily shaded by high walls, trees, or hedges, and lacks the benefit of plenteous sunshine, it is found that it more quickly becomes sour, and the addition of lime is the only remedy.

The best time to apply lime is in the winter or early spring, after the garden has been dug or trenched. Do not dig lime into the soil; it has a natural tendency to sink, especially with the action of rain, and to dig it in the lower layers, as is done with manure, means that the surface soil thus loses the benefit. If the soil is dug in the winter time, apply lime about January by scattering it over the surface at the rate of four to six ounces a square yard, in as finely powdered a state as possible, and then either hoe it in or prick it in lightly a few inches with a fork.

There are several forms of lime, but that most easily procurable by amateurs is slaked lime from a builder. For a small area and for ease in application pass it through a fine sieve. Advertised forms of lime may be procured from local seedsmen and used in accordance with the directions given.

Lime and manure should not be mixed or come into immediate contact with each other. The reason for this is that the ammonia from the manure will escape during the dormant season when there is no growth to take advantage of it, so that much of the virtue of the manure is wasted.

A simple test for the need of lime in the soil may be undertaken by anyone. Take a handful of soil from various parts of the garden or of the plot to be tested, mix them together and place a portion in a tumbler, then add a little muriatic acid, known also as hydrochloric acid. If this causes an effervescence or fizzing it may be safely presumed that there is chalk or lime in the soil, but if the fizzing is weak, or there is an entire absence of it, then the need for lime arises.

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